

**BEFORE**  
**THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION OF**  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
**DOCKET NO. 2021-22-C**

**IN RE:**

**Application of Aiken Electric  
 Cooperative, Inc. for Designation as an  
 Eligible Telecommunications Carrier  
 Pursuant to Section 214(e) of the  
 Communications Act of 1934**

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**DIRECT TESTIMONY  
 OF GARY STOOKSBURY**

**Q. PLEASE STATE YOUR NAME AND BUSINESS ADDRESS.**

A. My name is Gary L. Stooksbury. My business address is 2790 Wagener Road, Aiken,  
 South Carolina.

**Q. BY WHOM ARE YOU EMPLOYED AND IN WHAT CAPACITY?**

A. I am Chief Executive Officer of Aiken Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Q. PLEASE BRIEFLY OUTLINE YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE UTILITY  
 INDUSTRY.**

A. I have worked in the electric utility industry since 1978. I have been the CEO of Aiken  
 Electric Cooperative since 1995.

**Q. ON WHOSE BEHALF ARE YOU TESTIFYING HERE TODAY AND WHAT IS  
 THE PURPOSE OF YOUR TESTIMONY.**

A. I am testifying on behalf of Aiken Electric Cooperative, Inc. ("AEC") and its affiliate  
 AEConnect, LLC ("AEConnect").

1   **Q.     PLEASE DESCRIBE AECONNECT.**

2   A.     AEConnect is a wholly owned, for-profit subsidiary of AEC. AEConnect was formed in  
3           order to provide broadband service to the members of AEC and others living in or near the  
4           areas served by Aiken Electric Cooperative.

5   **Q.     PLEASE DESCRIBE THE BROADBAND BUSINESS PLAN OF AEC AND**  
6           **AECONNECT.**

7   A.     AEC and AEConnect will build and operate a fiber optic system generally in the area where  
8           AEC provides electric service. That fiber will be used by AEC in connection with its  
9           provision of electricity to its customers and by AEConnect to provide broadband and voice  
10          services. AEC and AEConnect have entered into agreements with CarolinaConnect  
11          Cooperative, Inc. ("CarolinaConnect") by which CarolinaConnect will use the  
12          AEC/AEConnect fiber to provide retail internet and voice service to customers passed by  
13          that fiber.

14  **Q.     DID AEC PARTICIPATE IN THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY**  
15          **FUND ("RDOF") PHASE I AUCTION CONDUCTED BY THE FEDERAL**  
16          **COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION?**

17  A.     Yes. AEC submitted an application and was awarded RDOF funds for service to the  
18          unserved census blocks in Census Block Group SC-003-0205003. The area covered by the  
19          AEC grant is shown on Exhibit B to the application filed in this proceeding.

20  **Q.     EXPLAIN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RDOF GRANT TO AEC AND**  
21          **THE APPLICATION MADE TO THIS COMMISSION FOR DESIGNATION AS**  
22          **AN ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROVIDER.**

1 A. The FCC rules in the RDOF process required any recipient of RDOF funds to apply to the  
2 state regulator to be designated as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (“ETC”). For  
3 that reason AEC has filed an application for designation as an ETC for the area shown on  
4 Exhibit B to its application.

5 **Q. HOW DOES AEC PLAN TO PROVIDE VOICE SERVICES AND MEET ITS**  
6 **OBLIGATIONS AS AN ETC?**

7 A. AEC is a member of CarolinaConnect. Under its agreement with CarolinaConnect,  
8 CarolinaConnect will be responsible for providing all retail services and complying with  
9 all regulatory requirements associated with those services, including all federal and South  
10 Carolina requirements associated with the ETC designation. CarolinaConnect was also a  
11 recipient of an RDOF award and it has also applied to this Commission for an ETC  
12 designation. CarolinaConnect personnel have extensive telecommunications experience  
13 and are very familiar with the regulatory requirements and obligations associated with the  
14 ETC designation. AEC is confident that CarolinaConnect will meet the requirements of the  
15 ETC designation. However, AEC is aware that it was the recipient of the RDOF grant, that  
16 it is the applicant for the ETC designation and that it is ultimately responsible for meeting  
17 the requirements of ETC designation. In my affidavit submitted to this Commission with  
18 this application I committed on behalf of AEC that we would meet all requirements of the  
19 ETC designation in the area for which we sought ETC status. We remain prepared and  
20 committed to meeting those requirements.

21 **Q. WILL GRANTING THE AEC APPLICATION IN THE PROCEEDING SERVE**  
22 **THE PUBLIC INTEREST?**

1 A. Yes. Electric Cooperatives like AEC are uniquely suited to help deploy broadband services  
2 through fiber optic cable in rural parts of South Carolina. Electric Cooperatives were  
3 originally formed to serve areas that were difficult and expensive to provide electricity. We  
4 know the communities and we know how important it is to those communities that  
5 broadband service be extended to them. Our governing boards are made up of people who  
6 live in those rural communities and who are worried about their communities falling behind  
7 if there is not an effort made to deploy broadband in them. By granting ETC status to AEC  
8 this Commission will allow us to meet one of the requirements for our RDOF grant and  
9 will help us to provide broadband and voice services in our service area.

10 **Q. DOES THIS CONCLUDE YOUR TESTIMONY?**

11 A. Yes.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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This is to certify that I, Toni Hawkins, a paralegal with the law firm of Robinson Gray Stepp & Laffitte, LLC have this day served a copy of the Direct Testimony of Gary L. Stooksbury on behalf of Aiken Electric Cooperative, Inc. in the foregoing matter via electronic mail as follows:

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Dated at Columbia, South Carolina this 4<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2021.

  
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